

## BLIZZARD OF '49, WYOMING PUBLIC TELEVISION ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Speaker 1: We're recording. Good. So, Ruth, why don't you first start out just give me your name so we can document that on-

Ruth Manring: My name is Ruth Manring.

Speaker 1: Okay. And we're here in Lusk, Wyoming today talking about the blizzard of '49. You were saying a little bit earlier that that January 1st was a nice day. Can you talk about that January 1st a little bit?

Ruth Manring: Yes. The day before the blizzard hit, we had gone to dinner at our friend's across the street. I remember coming home about maybe 9:00 or 9:30 and oh how beautiful it was! Just a beautiful evening and quiet, no wind, and the streets were dry and I appreciated that because of having to take Sam across the street in the wheelchair. It was a nice day, that day.

Speaker 1: And then a nice night that night ...

Ruth Manring: A nice night that night, right.

Speaker 1: Then the next day you told me that you went to church in the morning.

Ruth Manring: Uh-huh.

Speaker 1: Let's pick it up there.

Ruth Manring: Okay. We went to church about 11:00 and when we got out at 12:00, there were a few flakes of snow in the air. I went down the steps, there were a number of steps from the church, and some young fellows came over and carried Sam down in his wheelchair. By the time we got down, it was beginning to snow really hard, and so I ... [00:02:00] Larry, my younger son and I, and Sam had took him up to where the alley was from the church, and we went up that alley just as fast as we could go, and it was snowing worse and worse all the time!

By the time we got to the gate we could hardly see. This is when we started up that ramp and got up to the top and Sam was trying to help me by ... he had one good arm and the railing on the ramp was on this side, and he was helping and he couldn't feel, of course, whether he was sitting in the chair or not, he didn't have a feeling in there. When we got to the top he kept pulling and he slid out of the chair onto the ramp

there, and of course, the wheelchair fell backwards and I fell backwards, or fell, and when I finally got up, I had no idea how I was going to get Sam into that wheelchair again.

Speaker 1: And the snow was blowing ...

Ruth Manring: The snow was blowing by that time, and I looked around and I could see no one, no one anywhere that I could call to, and I knew I needed help, so Sam told our son, to go inside and to get a little stool, and he got this little stool and he put it right beside his dad, he followed his instructions and Sam used that stool [00:04:00] to lift himself up so he could sit on it. From there, then I could get him into the wheelchair. That's the way we got into the house then. Fortunately, the house wasn't locked, and so we had access to it there easily.

Speaker 1: We're going to back up a little bit, and can you explain how your husband became injured?

Ruth Manring: He was in the battle on Attu island and he was wounded in the shoulder, here, and it went through his spine, and left him paralyzed. His right arm was partly paralyzed. He had use of his left arm.

Speaker 1: Which he was trying to use to help-

Ruth Manring: Yes.

Speaker 1: To grab that railing.

Ruth Manring: Yes. That's right. He pulled himself out.

Speaker 1: So you finally get ... You must have been frightened.

Ruth Manring: Oh, I was very frightened and I don't know, I suppose he was frightened, but he kept saying "Everything's going to be all right." He kept reassuring us. "Don't worry, now, we're gonna make this all right." So, that kept us going.

Speaker 1: I bet. So, you get into the house,-

Ruth Manring: Uh-huh.

Speaker 1: The blizzard is probably in full swing at that point.

Ruth Manring: Yes. I would say it was.

Speaker 1: So, how long ... I think I've read that that first storm lasted about three days?

Ruth Manring: Yes, uh-huh.

Speaker 1: So you were just house-bound for those-

Ruth Manring: We were house-bound. Fortunately we had our electricity, which powered our furnace, and so forth, so we got along all right. We managed.

Speaker 1: Good. Then I guess the temperatures had really dropped and the wind [00:06:00] was howling throughout that entire storm-

Ruth Manring: That's right, uh-huh.

Speaker 1: And so, I think it ended by Wednesday, and it cleared up. Did you go into ... At what point did you go into downtown Lusk to see what had happened?

Ruth Manring: Well, it was quite a long time before I got downtown. I recall going out and climbing on a pile of snow that was out in the yard. It was like ice. I could see up and down main street to see what it looked like, and then I scooped off the ramp that led to Sam's workshop, because he had a wood-working shop, and was very anxious to get back to working on his project again. I went out and I recall scooping that off and then the little boys, they came out and they played in the snow. I remember them saying that this was the first time that they had ever been as high as the roof. They were in a snow bank as high as the roof.

Speaker 1: The drifts were that high?!

Ruth Manring: They were that high.

Speaker 1: Wow!

Ruth Manring: Right, uh-huh.

Speaker 1: When you went out and got on top of this snow bank and surveyed downtown, what did you see?

Ruth Manring: Snow. Just snow.

Speaker 1: I think I was telling you that I saw all of these pictures of these snowdrifts up by the Golden Rule, and-

Ruth Manring: Yes. Everything was covered. You just didn't see any buildings at all.

Speaker 1: There were probably no cars moving in the streets?

Ruth Manring: Oh no! No cars moving. The cars were all covered [00:08:00] with snow and would be for quite a while.

Speaker 1: But eventually the county came in with snow plows?

Ruth Manring: Yes. The Highway 20 was opened, I would say very well. They did very well opening Highway 20, and so ... I ...

Speaker 1: So they finally got it opened. Do you remember ... I know the army was called in at a point. Do you recall seeing any military vehicles around town, like bit military bulldozers, or anything like that?

Ruth Manring: I probably would have if I had been able to get downtown, but see, I couldn't. I needed to be there to take care of Sam. I couldn't leave him, and so I was pretty well house-bound, uh-huh.

Speaker 1: Right. You had enough food-source?

Ruth Manring: Yes. We had enough food. We didn't suffer that way.

Speaker 1: Were the grocery stores supplied by train or truck? I don't think anything got in or out of Lusk, so were the grocery stores starting to get low on food, do you recall?

Ruth Manring: Well, I imagine they were, but most of the food for the grocery stores came by truck, so they were dependent on the highway.

Speaker 1: So basically, Lusk was cut off in most directions-

Ruth Manring: Yes.

Speaker 1: For sometime.

Ruth Manring: Yes it was, uh-huh.

Speaker 1: Do you recall any of your neighbors having any problems with the storm? Do you recall any stories from them?

Ruth Manring: No. Because they were all dug out before we were. It took our neighbors to get us [00:10:00] dug out. They just all came over and worked together and got us dug out in a hurry, once they got going.

Speaker 1: That's another thing that I've been noticing through my research, is how people really pulled together-

Ruth Manring: Oh yes!

Speaker 1: During this storm.

Ruth Manring: They did.

Speaker 1: Really looked out for one another.

Ruth Manring: Yes. Uh-huh.

Speaker 1: I don't know if the same thing were to happen in a big city, or if that's just a small town phenomenon-

Ruth Manring: I don't know, but it sure was good to be here in Lusk, because people were wonderful. We had planned to go to one of our friends for dinner on that day, so I had a large salad in the refrigerator, so we had plenty of salad to do us ... throughout the storm. No one was able to get there, no one could get out of their house at all. They stayed in.

Speaker 1: You were also telling me the story about over in Harrison. Was it one of your children that went over there?

Ruth Manring: Yes.

Speaker 1: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Ruth Manring: Yes. Our older son, Don, was in Harrison. They had gone down on the train. My sister had taken him for a ride on the train. She had promised him a ride, and this was a good day, she said, the first day of January would be a good day to take him for a ride, and so this is what she did. She took him over there and, of course, then the train was stuck in Harrison. They were down there for a couple of weeks before they got back.

Speaker 1: So you were concerned at first, I'm sure?!

Ruth Manring: Oh yes! Very much concerned! But we were thankful we could call, and so we could call [00:12:00] down there. If they could tell you, there would be experiences that they had-

Speaker 1: Sure.

Ruth Manring: That would be interesting, but I don't know about that.

Speaker 1: Sure. Right. From what I'm hearing, a lot of the ranches around the Lusk area had a serious kill-off of their livestock?

Ruth Manring: Yes. They did. A lot of livestock was lost.

Speaker 1: I don't know about wildlife around here,-

Ruth Manring: Oh yes! And wildlife. Uh-huh. Yes.

Speaker 1: Yeah? I've heard stories of cattle being frozen, just standing in place-

Ruth Manring: Yeah.

Speaker 1: And sheep being buried.

Ruth Manring: Yes. In fence corners, and so forth. Just froze there. Still standing. They were just frozen.

Speaker 1: It's just tragic.

Ruth Manring: Tragic.

Speaker 1: Just really a tremendous loss of income, too for those ranchers, I'm sure.

Ruth Manring: What was that?

Speaker 1: A tremendous loss of income for those ranchers too.

Ruth Manring: Oh yes! I should say!

Speaker 1: The first blizzard lasted for about three days, but that wasn't the end of it, was it? Did storm after storm keep coming in? I've read that it-

Ruth Manring: Yes!

Speaker 1: It really didn't stop until around the end of February?

Ruth Manring: That's right. We did have a lot of storms.

Speaker 1: The snow just kept piling up and up and up?

Ruth Manring: Uh-huh. Yes.

Speaker 1: So, spring comes ... Was there a messy spring, do you recall, with mud and a lot of water, or was it maybe a green spring, because there was-

Ruth Manring: No. It was good. As I recall, we had a nice spring! We did. [00:14:00]

Speaker 1: All that snow-melt must have made things pretty green around here, too.

Ruth Manring: Yes. That's right.

Speaker 1: Well, good! Anything else that you can recollect that you want to share?

Ruth Manring: I just can't remember much more about it.

Speaker 1: Sure.

Ruth Manring: It's been a long time ago!

Speaker 1: Sure was! It was! Well, then I think that's going to do it! I really appreciate your help this morning!

Ruth Manring: Well, thank you very much!

Speaker 1: Thanks Ruth! Great! Let's cut.